

Sexual diversity could become part of Chinese harmony

Peter Dankmeijer, 11 May, 2013

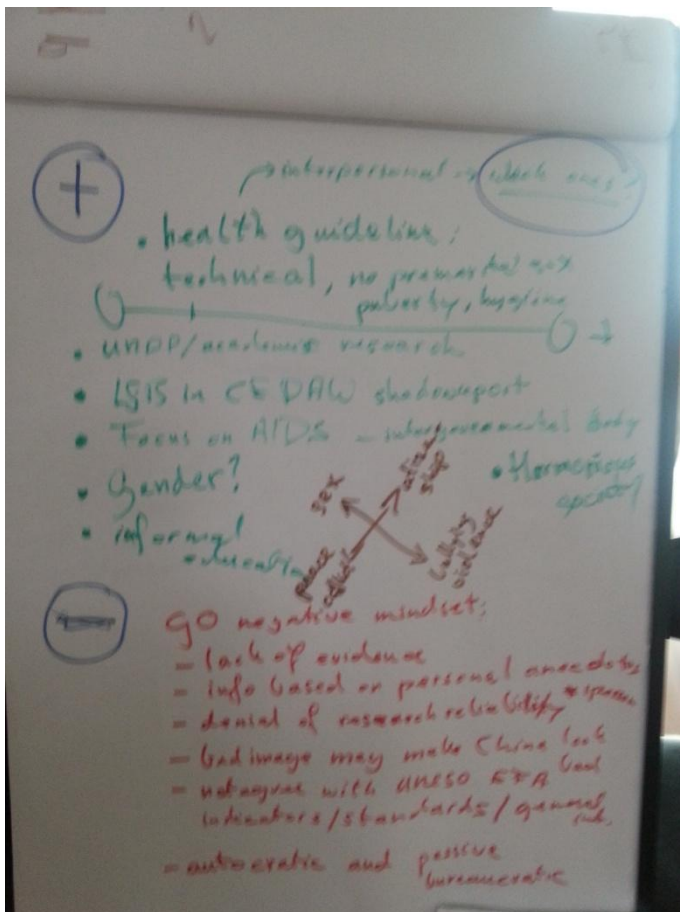
Chinese activists from different organizations met on May 10 to discuss strategic opportunities to enhance the implementation of the right to education in China. The general conclusion was that it should be better researched how the LGBT needs fit best into the priorities of the Chinese government and can be linked to Chinese cultural values. Since China has always strived for harmony, this seems to be an interesting way to frame new strategies.

The workshops on how to develop an education strategy was organized by the Beijing LGBT Center in cooperation with Common Language, an organization that already offers informal education sessions to university students. It was attended by 15 activists, teachers, school counselors and a representative of UNESCO in China. The workshop was facilitated by Peter Dankmeijer, director of GALE (Global Alliance for LGBT Education). The workshop is inspired by the UNESCO publication on homophobic bullying in schools, but takes the issue one step further by informing and discussing the ways in which local activists, professionals in schools and government officials can strategically operate and if possible, cooperate.

The Chinese participants were quite inspired by a tentative description of 3 possible phases a State can be in: a denying, ambiguous or supportive phase. The group analyzed that China was somewhere in the early stages of the ambiguous phase. This situation is one where the government does not forbid anything, but may act repressive or completely disinterested. For activist organizations, who just emerge from a denying situation, this is difficult to cope with. Their traditional strategy would be to initiate provocative ad hoc actions in order to challenge the current situation and make needs visible. This strategy has regularly lead to the police trying or succeeding in cancelling the event, often without argument. There is no direct

contact with the government or specifically with the Ministry of Education. At the start of the workshop it was perceived that a dialogue was impossible.

One of the processes developing during an ambiguous phase is that LGBT organizations slowly evolve from enemies of the government to cooperation partners. This was a new and refreshing perspective for the Chinese participants, which inspired them to think about how adapt their goals, strategies and advocacy methods. They decided more research is needed



about the educational goals, challenges and strategies of the government. This would enable the LGBT movement to better link into mainstream priorities and to 'frame' their needs into education policy language. Examples of such framing could be to link into the government priority for HIV-prevention, sexual health and teaching 'interpersonal skills'. The discourse on this could be framed as 'harmonious' living together in diversity rather than promotion of sexual diversity as a specific priority.

Photo: part of the SWOT analysis in China

The workshop concluded with the recommendation to follow-up this analysis by starting a strategy development project, in which activist organizations work together with UNESCO, UNDP, universities, some secondary schools and if possible with government officials to research and develop in a joint strategy plan that is acceptable for all stakeholders and that offers a space for small scale experiments on sexual diversity education that link into mainstream guidelines and policies.